DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 476 401 CS 511 977

AUTHOR	Chromik, Megan
TITLE	Proofreading, Its Value, and Its Place in the Writing Center.
PUB DATE	2002-10-00
NOTE	15p.
PUB TYPE	Opinion Papers (120)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Error Correction; Higher Education; Plagiarism; *Proofreading; *Revision (Written Composition); *Student Needs; *Writing Laboratories; *Writing Skills
IDENTIFIERS	Tutor Role; University of Connecticut

ABSTRACT

For the purposes of this paper, proofreading will be defined as the final step of revising a paper. The paper describes what one writing lab, the Writing Center at the University of Connecticut, does to provide students with one-to-one help with their writing. It explains that services in the center include individual tutorials, a grammar hotline, campus workshops, a resource library, and support for writing groups. It points out, however, that writing centers steer clear of anything that verges on plagiarism, and so staff members shy away when it comes to proofreading. The paper notes that since the goal of the writing center is to improve the writer and not the writing, editing and proofreading are deemed inappropriate. It then discusses why proofreading needs to be incorporated in a tutoring session once global issues have been resolved and how it can be made an integral part of the writing center. It states that proofreading is a necessary skill for anyone who writes, and a writing center would be that much more beneficial to students if it could help them to develop this skill. (Contains 15 references.) (NKA)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 476 401

Proofreading, Its Value, and Its Place in the Writing Center.

by Megan Chromik

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

M. T. Chromik

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

CS 511 977

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Proofreading, Its Value, and Its Place in the Writing Center

What Is Proofreading?

There is no one clear definition of proofreading. One is likely to discover different meanings about what proofreading entails through the investigation of different sources. For example, one definition reads, "Proofreading refers to the process of reading written work for 'surface errors.' These are errors involving spelling, punctuation, grammar and word choice" (Indiana). A definition provided by The Writing Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill compares proofreading to editing and treats the two as separate processes:

> Although many people use the terms interchangeably, proofreading and editing are two different stages of the revision process. . . . Editing is what you begin doing as soon as you finish your first draft. You want to reread to see, for example, if the paper is well-organized, the transitions between paragraphs are smooth, and your evidence really backs up your argument. . . . Proofreading is the final stage of the editing process, focusing on surface errors such as misspellings and mistakes in grammar and punctuation. (UNC)

David Peter Noskin says, "One of the biggest lessons I've learned during my tenure as a teacher is that revising and editing are not the same," where he uses editing to mean proofreading (37). Furthermore, Diana Hacker writes, "Proofreading is a special kind of reading: a slow and methodical search for misspellings, typographical mistakes, and omitted words or word endings" (21). While each of these definitions has something in common with the others, not one is completely the same.

Here, proofreading will be defined as the final step of revising a paper. Rather than an earlier and often focused upon step of revising, making global revisions to a paper, proofreading

consists of making sentence-level revisions. While global revisions ask the writer to think about the thesis and overall organization of the paper, sentence-level revisions include checking for errors of grammar, punctuation, spelling, citations, word choice and also include finding typographical errors. In other words, proofreading consists of finding any types of error, besides global errors, that exist to adversely affect the reading of a paper.

What Is the Value of Proofreading?

Many people overlook proofreading as something unnecessary to anyone but the pickiest of nitpicks. This may not stem so much from people's thinking that proofreading is not important but rather their thinking that proofreading is tedious and time consuming. The number of handbooks and web sites that exist to help people proofread should be evidence enough that proofreading is incredibly important to the success of a paper. Hacker says proofreading is "the final and most important step in manuscript preparation" (21). If one does not proofread well, he cannot bring across the ideas in his paper well either.

While it is necessary that the ideas of a paper be presented well and in tact, the lack of good proofreading will cause a lack in the reader's ability to focus on the content of the paper. Shawni McBride recognizes, "Content-rich writing was, of course, most important, but there were many times when errors in spelling and grammar interfered with content" (47). While content matters most, if the content cannot be understood because of poor proofreading, the whole paper suffers. "Content is important. But like it or not, the way a paper looks affects the way others judge it" (UNC). A paper could be completely consistent in content but contain punctuation, spelling, or other errors that could make the ideas presented in the paper incoherent. Hacker writes,

> Although proofreading may be dull, it is crucial. Errors strewn throughout an essay are distracting and annoying. If the writer doesn't care about this piece of writing, thinks the reader, why should I? A carefully proofread essay, on the other hand, sends a positive message: It shows that you value your writing and respect your readers. (21)

Proofreading should be looked at as equally important to the paper as any other part of the writing and revision process. "There are certain fundamental concepts that students need to know so that they can construct complete sentences that are correctly punctuated and free from major errors in usage" (Noskin 38). A paper cannot be considered complete if this final step which addresses these errors is skipped. Shelly D. Smede writes, "If anything, I've learned that revision is the most critical part of the writing process" (117). Unfortunately, a student can receive any other type of help with the writing process, except for proofreading, at a writing center.

What Is a Writing Center?

Writing centers were designed with the intention of helping students to better their writing skills and abilities. According to Stephen North, "[I]n a writing center the object is to make sure that writers, and not necessarily their texts, are what get changed by instruction. In axiom form it goes like this: our job is to produce better writers, not better writing" (76). A general format for a writing center tutorial would be a one-on-one conference between a tutor and a writer during which the writer could ask the tutor for help on various aspects of his paper.

The Writing Center at the University of Connecticut "provide[s] students with one-to-one help with their writing. [They] work with writers at every point in the writing process" (UConn). They advertise,

> If you need help writing and revising essays, generating or organizing your ideas, or understanding the readings required for your writing assignments, Writing Center Tutors are available to assist you. The Writing Center is not a proofreading service, and tutors will not edit your paper for you; however, we do offer limited grammar assistance. (UConn)

Additionally, The Writing Center at UNC "aims to provide members of the University community with free, non-credit avenues for improving their writing. Services in the center include individual tutorials, a grammar hotline, campus workshops, a resource library, and support for writing groups" (UNC). Furthermore, The University of Maine's Writing Center reports,

> Our goal is to help you become a better writer and we believe that collaboration is the key. We won't proofread your paper, but we will help you think critically about your own writing and hopefully give suggestions to make it stronger. Our sessions are for all types of writing and last anywhere between 5 minutes to an hour - it's up to you! Whether you're working on an essay, a biology report, or a graduate thesis, we'll try our best to assist you. (UM)

Why Do Writing Centers Tend to Stay Away from Proofreading?

While these writing centers advertise helpful services regarding the writing of papers, none broadcast proofreading. This, in essence, could be because they consider proofreading something that could cross the line. There is a certain amount of collaboration necessary in the writing center atmosphere, but too much could verge on plagiarism, which is defined at UConn as academic misconduct and

> includes, but is not limited to, providing or receiving assistance in a manner not authorized by the instructor in the creation of work to be submitted for academic evaluation (e.g. papers, projects, and examinations); any attempt to influence improperly (e.g. bribery, threats) any members of the faculty, staff, or administration of the University in any manner pertaining to academics or research; presenting, as one's own, the ideas or words of another for academic evaluation; doing unauthorized academic work for which another person will receive credit or be evaluated; and presenting the same or substantially the same papers or projects in two or more courses without the explicit permission of the instructors involved. (UConn Student Code)

No writing center needs a reputation associated with plagiarism, and because they fear crossing this line, most writing center staff members shy away when it comes to proofreading.

A writing center exists to help a student with anything from forming an idea for a paper to working through global revisions but usually excludes proofreading. Since the goal of the writing center is to improve the writer and not the writing, editing and proofreading are deemed inappropriate (Hawthorne 1). It is possible that the focus of the tutorial could be directed at the text rather than the writer of the text and, hence, undermine the whole idea of needing to improve the writer. Beth Rapp Young suggests, "Another argument is that proofreading supports an unrealistic view of writing-as-product, not process" (112). Young also presents the question of whether "writers [will] even bother to proofread if they know someone skilled at writing can do it for them" (112). Students need to realize that they need to know how to proofread as much as they need to know how to correct their global errors, and, for this reason, they should not rely on the tutor to proofread for them.

Proofreading, on its own, ignores the global revisions often necessary in papers that are brought to the writing center. Obviously, the first stage in revising a paper should be making the global revisions; otherwise, the tutor and writer may waste time trying to proofread parts of the paper that will just end up getting scrapped and rewritten after global revisions anyways. Young alludes to Irene Clark who wrote that building a table should come before polishing it. Her point illustrates the primary need for global revisions by comparing proofreading before making global revisions to polishing pieces of wood that have not yet been built as a table and may not even be used. Since proofreading is looked at as secondary, there may also not always be time for proofreading during a tutoring session, and it may be overlooked for this simple reason as well.

Also proofreading can be daunting for tutors because some tutors do not feel they have sharp enough grammar and common errors skills to enable them to help students with these problems. If a tutor is not comfortable with finding and fixing grammar errors on his own, he will not be comfortable with pointing them out to a tutee and helping the tutee to fix them. Besides worries about plagiarism, tutors at writing centers also worry about themselves and their possible lack of expertise. This is yet another reason that assistance with proofreading is not prevalent in writing centers.

Why Should Proofreading Be a Part of the Writing Center?

Although there is much opposition to proofreading in the writing center, proofreading needs to be incorporated in a tutoring session once global issues have been resolved. Young asks, "How can a writing center be complete, providing help from invention to revision, if it doesn't pay full attention to that final step?" (112). Students may not return to the writing center if they realize they are still doing poorly on papers because they were not given help with

proofreading. Hawthorne writes, "We've agreed it's not good enough to work only on improving the student: students won't use the writing center a second time if they believe their papers are no better after they've gone to the trouble of scheduling a conference" (6). While working on global issues may eliminate some of a student's writing problems, overlooking proofreading will cause other problems to remain and will prevent the student from doing well on his assignment.

"Some writing centers try to stay away from proofreading altogether. Yet the fact is, students enter most writing centers expecting to receive help on all aspects of their writing, including final editing" (Young 111). A writing center that refuses to meet student needs is not truly a writing center, considering the purpose of the writing center is to help students with all aspects of writing a paper. Hawthorne states, "Editing concerns were usually among the issues that students hoped to discuss" (4). She also says, "Writing center tutors work on editing and proofreading because those are important issues to teachers and students alike" (1-2). If proofreading is what is important to both students and teachers, writing centers should be able to provide help in this area as well. "When we spend a session focused on minor proofreading details, we've acknowledged that we may be meeting genuine needs perceived by both faculty and students," Hawthorne justifies (6).

Proofreading is a skill that students will find necessary after graduation, and if the writing center can give them some pointers and suggestions on how to proofread, like those found in the next section, students will be better prepared for what may occur later in the writing aspect of their lives. Young supports this: "Helping a writer to proofread can be tremendously valuable when it is done for the purpose of teaching the student to find her own errors" (113).

North sees that teachers expect the writing center to provide this type of help, but he does

not agree that proofreading should be a responsibility of the writing center. A professor remarked, "'Well, I had a student hand in a paper that he took to the writing center and it was *still* full of errors'" (North 80). North responded, "The axiom, if you will recall, is that we aim to make better writers, not necessarily – or immediately – better texts" (80). However, as Hawthorne suggested, North's strategy of simply bettering the writer is not enough. If the writer is to improve, he must be shown how to improve all aspects of his writing, and, hence, the writer and the writing will improve together.

How Can Proofreading Be Made an Integral Part of the Writing Center?

Because of the need to make sure students do their own work, incorporating proofreading in the writing center atmosphere appears to be a difficult feat. The Undergraduate Writing Center at the University of Texas at Austin shares its strategy, "Although we do not edit or proofread students' papers, we do teach students effective and efficient strategies for editing and proofreading their own work" (UT-A). Hawthorne provides, "And if [students] truly wanted to work on proofreading, I thought, tutors could at least make sure students learned something about self-editing" (2). Hawthorne suggests this because, otherwise, students might bring their papers to friends who will simply make the corrections for the students, but the students will have learned nothing about how to proofread on their own. Also, when students do this, they are committing plagiarism. A writing center that offers the service of teaching students to proofread could help to alleviate such problems of plagiarism. Hawthorne thinks that "it is possible to work on proofreading issues without proofreading for the student. . . . Students can be taught to proofread for themselves, just as they're taught to develop their own ideas and support their own theses" (6).

Proofreading should be treated in the same way as global issues. When a tutor helps a student develop a thesis, the tutor does not create a thesis for the student but rather gives the student the instruction and means to develop his own thesis. Proofreading can be done in much the same way. The tutor and student can locate errors together, and if the student does not know how to correct the error, the tutor can show him how and what sources to go to so that the next time the student encounters this error he will have the tools to fix it himself. Most writing centers are equipped with various handbooks, worksheets, or other proofreading guides that the tutor and student can and should take advantage of.

Young provides some suggestions as to how to go about proofreading in the writing center. First, the tutor should be sure to go over the paper as a whole. "After all," explains Young, "once the writer changes the ideas and sentences, proofreading must begin all over again" (111). The most important tip is to take a break after finishing the paper and before beginning to proofread. "Writers can learn from tutors how to step back from the piece and see it with fresh eyes," writes Young (112). Young then gives these other proofreading techniques: read the paper to someone else, look at the paper slowly, read backward, word by word to check for spelling mistakes and typographical errors, and keep a list of frequent mistakes to specifically check for in each new assignment (121-22).

Another way to help students is to find a frequently occurring grammar or punctuation error and make up sentences with that error for the student to correct. Once the student can identify this error in the sample sentences, he can apply this newfound knowledge to his paper. The student should learn how to identify this error, what the rule for it is, and how to best correct it. In order to keep the student focused on the specific error, the tutor could send the student off

with exercises that the student could use for practice. The tutor should think like Noskin who says, "My role is not to identify every error; instead, my purpose is to give my students the rudimentary tools in grammar and usage. . . so they can edit their own writing" (38). Similarly, Amy Martinsen says, "We must force students to take these rules of grammar and use them in their own sentences. We can, for example, have students look critically at their own paragraphs, marking split infinitives, misused pronouns or tense problems" (125). It is important for tutors to teach students to recognize errors and to find and correct these errors in their own writing. McBride says,

> for instance, if students are misusing apostrophes, they could look over their writing and explain the rationale behind the errors. If there is no rationale, then students could be asked to create and then explain an appropriate rationale based on rules of grammar and then write it down in their own words. Or students could be taught this rule or concept during a conference, then be asked to explain their new understanding in writing and apply it through example. (50)

McBride also suggests, "Students who struggle with fragments can pay particular attention to making sure they write sentences that are complete" (47). Not all students are the same, and each student will have different errors in his paper. The tutor needs to look at teaching a student to proofread as a process that needs to focus on the individual. Just like tutoring any other parts of the writing process, tutoring proofreading needs to be tailored to each student.

What Can Be Concluded?

Writing centers need to take a more active approach toward including and teaching proofreading. Since proofreading is something that teachers value, it is also something that

students value and should, therefore, be something that writing centers value. There are obviously ways to help students with proofreading without doing the work for them as there are ways to help students with devising a thesis without writing a thesis for them. Writing center staff members need not fear being unskilled at grammar or punctuation. As long as the tutor and the student can recognize the errors, and the tutor knows how to look up the remedy to the errors, helping a student proofread during a tutoring session should go quite smoothly. As Young mentioned in her article, tutors are not expected to be experts and are more than welcomed to turn to a handbook (113). Actually, this is a good idea because then the student being tutored may also benefit from learning how to look up grammatical and other errors. Proofreading is a necessary skill for anyone who writes, and a writing center would be that much more beneficial to students if it could help them to develop this skill.

Works Cited

"About the Writing Center." Writing Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. 2 July 1998. 29 March 2002. <http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/Org.html>.

"Editing and Proofreading." Writing Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. 9 Jan 2001. 29 March 2002. http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/proofread.html>.

Hacker, Diana. A Writer's Reference. 4th ed. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1999.

Hawthorne, Joan. "'We Don't Proofread Here:' Revisioning the Writing Center to Better Meet Student Needs." The Writing Lab Newsletter. Ed. Muriel Harris. Vol 23, No. 8. April 1999.

Martinsen, Amy. "The Tower of Babel and the Teaching of Grammar: Writing Instruction for a New Century. English Journal. (July 2000)

McBride, Shawni. "'Why Are You So Worried About It?'" Struggles and Solutions toward Helping Students Improve as Writers." English Journal. (July 2000)

North, Stephen. "The Idea of a Writing Center." College English. National Council of Teachers of English, Sept 1984.

Noskin, David Peter. "Teaching Writing in the High School: Fifteen Years in the Making." English Journal 90 (Sept. 2000)

"Proofreading for Common Surface Errors: Spelling, Punctuation, and Grammar." University of Indiana. 29 March 2002. <http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/wts/proofreading.html>.

Smede, Shelly D. "Interior Design: Revision as Focus." English Journal. 89 (July 2000)

"The University of Maine Writing Center Online." The University of Maine Writing Center. 29

March 2002. <http://www.ume.maine.edu/~wcenter/main.html>.

"The Writing Center at the University of Connecticut: Who We Are." The Writing Center at the University of Connecticut. 29 March 2002. <http://vm.uconn.edu/~engadm12/whoweare.htm>.

"Undergraduate Writing Center at the University of Texas at Austin." Writing Center at the University of Texas at Austin. Feb 2001. 29 March 2002. <http://uwc.fac.utexas.edu/about/index.html>.

University of Connecticut. "Responsibilities of Community Life: The Student Code." <Http://vm.uconn.edu/~dosa8/code2.html>.

Young, Beth Rapp. "Can You Proofread This?" A Tutor's Guide: Helping Writers One to One. Ed. Ben Rafoth. New Hampshire: Boynton/Cook Publishers, Inc., 2000. 111-22.

CS 511 977

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
(OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)
Reproduction Release (Specific Document)

ERIC
Educational Resources Information Center

I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

Title: Proofreading, Its Value, and Its Place in the Writing Center	
Author(s): Megan Chromik	
Corporate Source: University of Connecticut Writing Center	Publication Date: Oct. 2002

II. REPRODUCTION RELEASE:

In order to disseminate as widely as possible timely and significant materials of interest to the educational community, documents announced in the monthly abstract journal of the ERIC system, Resources in Education (RIE), are usually made available to users in microfiche, reproduced paper copy, and electronic media, and sold through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). Credit is given to the source of each document, and, if reproduction release is granted, one of the following notices is affixed to the document.

If permission is granted to reproduce and disseminate the identified document, please CHECK ONE of the following three options and sign in the indicated space following.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 1 documents	The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2A documents	The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2B documents
PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY SAMPLE TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)	PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE, AND IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA FOR ERIC COLLECTION SUBSCRIBERS ONLY, HAS BEEN GRANTED BY SAMPLE TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)	PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY SAMPLE TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
Level 1	**Level 2A**	**Level 2B**
↑ [X]	↑ [ ]	↑ [ ]
Check here for Level 1 release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche or other ERIC archival media (e.g. electronic) *and* paper copy.	Check here for Level 2A release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche and in electronic media for ERIC archival collection subscribers only	Check here for Level 2B release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche only

Documents will be processed as indicated provided reproduction quality permits.
If permission to reproduce is granted, but no box is checked, documents will be processed at Level 1.

I hereby grant to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) nonexclusive permission to reproduce and disseminate this document as indicated above. Reproduction from the ERIC microfiche, or electronic media by persons other than ERIC employees and its system contractors requires permission from the copyright holder. Exception is made for non-profit reproduction by libraries and other service agencies to satisfy information needs of educators in response to discrete inquiries.

Signature: Megan T. Chromik	Printed Name/Position/Title: Megan T. Chromik
Organization/Address: 169 Johnson Street Naugatuck, CT 06770	Telephone: 203-217-7404 Fax:
	E-mail Address: megs91581@aol.com Date: May 1, 2003

III. DOCUMENT AVAILABILITY INFORMATION (FROM NON-ERIC SOURCE):